

BRIEFING NOTE TO THE MINISTER OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES**ENVIRONMENTAL PETITION REGARDING THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SIXTH
ROAD LINK BETWEEN OTTAWA AND GATINEAU**

(For Information)

PURPOSE

- To provide the Minister with information about the process to respond to an environmental petition submitted by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development (CESD) on behalf of the petitioner, received June 7, 2019.

HIGHLIGHTS/KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- The petitioner, Healthy Transportation Coalition, has asked for five questions to be answered related to the environmental impacts of a sixth road that links Ottawa and Gatineau. This potential link would primarily accommodate cars rather than public transit (Annex A).
- The petition references several Government of Canada (GoC) commitments. They include: the investigation of a sixth road link between the cities included in Budget 2019; the 2015 Paris Agreement on emissions reduction; and decisions by the Canadian Transportation Agency, the City of Ottawa and the GoC with respect to the Prince of Wales bridge (a former rail bridge to the west of the cities) and other potential options to enhance interprovincial transportation.
- The questions are mostly directed at the Ministers of Transport and Environment and Climate Change. The Minister of Infrastructure and Communities is identified by the petitioner as a respondent to question 4, which seeks details on funding provided to both cities for road and public transit projects. However, the CESD has determined that the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities does not need to respond directly and has been provided the petition for information only.

KEY BACKGROUND

- The environmental petitions process was created in 1995 as a formal means for Canadians to bring their concerns about environmental and sustainable development issues to the attention and response of federal ministers.
- The CESD manages the petition process on behalf of the Auditor General of Canada, who presents an annual report to Parliament. This annual report summarizes petitions received, trends and issues raised, and response rates during

the year. Periodically, the Auditor General includes examples of cases that have prompted petitions.

- Responses to petitions are done in two stages. An acknowledgment of receipt must be sent within 15 calendar days. Ministers then have up to 120 calendar days to provide a substantive response – unless the Minister advises the petitioner in writing that a response will take longer. Petitions and responses are posted on the web site of the Office of the Auditor General.

NEXT STEPS

- Transport Canada, the lead federal department, will organize an interdepartmental working group. This group will consist of subject matter experts and environmental petitions coordinators from Environment and Climate Change Canada as well as Infrastructure Canada to review the questions and determine if joint or individual responses will be developed.
- Departments will also engage, as needed, with their respective legal services and communications teams.
- A draft of the response(s) will be provided to the Minister's Office(s) in the fall of 2019 for comments. The final response(s) must be shared with the petitioner no later than October 5, 2019.

 Kelly Gillis Deputy Minister Infrastructure and Communities	 Ingrid Date
--	--

Attachment:

Annex A – Environmental Petition no. 0425 – Public Transit, Municipal Priorities, and Federal Government Intervention

ANNEX A

Healthy Transportation Environmental Petition

Name of Petitioner:

[REDACTED]

Name of the Group:

Healthy Transportation Coalition



Address of Petitioner:

Healthy Transportation Coalition

[REDACTED]

Telephone Number:

[REDACTED]

Email Address:

[REDACTED]

I hereby submit this petition to the Auditor General of Canada under section 22 of the *Auditor General Act*.

Signature of petitioner:

[REDACTED]

Date: 31 May 2019

Title of the Petition:

Public Transit, Municipal Priorities, and Federal Government Intervention

Summary:

On March 19, 2019 the federal government's Budget 2019 called for opening an investigation into building a sixth bridge interprovincial bridge linking the cities of Ottawa and Gatineau crossing the Ottawa River. Yet the City of Ottawa, the City of Gatineau, and many locals on the ground find this project misaligned with their priorities. They would rather focus on intercity

public light rail transit (LRT) through the Prince of Wales bridge. Yet instead of putting this priority in the budget, the federal government actively allowed for a slowdown in intercity rail transportation by intervening to rescind a Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA) decision regarding the Prince of Wales bridge. The Healthy Transportation Coalition and other Ottawa-based organizations are concerned both these federal government interventions promote increased car usage over public transportation, thereby increasing greenhouse gas emissions and hindering Canada's efforts to combat climate change. All questions are addressed to the Minister of Transportation as this petition centers around different types of transportation in Ottawa and Gatineau. This petition also centers around the climate change impacts of transportation and environmental assessments therefore it is also addressed to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Background:

On December 12, 2015 under the Paris Agreement, Canada committed to reducing its GHG emissions by 30% below 2005 levels by 2030. The transportation sector is the second largest GHG emitter in Canada. From 1990 to 2015 there was a 42% increase in emissions from transportation and this is projected to keep growing. A major way to curb GHG emissions is to improve public transit and transition to transit by rail. The federal government acknowledges this and in Prime Minister Trudeau's mandate letter to the Minister of Transport, he lists improving public transit and green infrastructure as one of the Minister's top priorities. Yet despite these commitments and priorities, the federal government intervened on two bridge projects in Ottawa in ways that may delay public rail transportation and promote personal vehicle usage.

The first intervention is as follows:

In the summer of 2016, Moose Consortium Inc., a group with ambitions to build commuter rail lines to outlying Quebec and Ontario communities, complained to the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA) that the City of Ottawa dismantled 240 meters of rail line between Bayview Station and the Prince of Wales (POW) Bridge. The CTA also learned that the city would be constructing a permanent structure on the railway right-of-way that would create an obstruction and prevent future railway operations over the POW Bridge into Quebec.

In February of 2017, city staff confirmed to the CTA they removed the tracks and constructed a new entrance to Bayview Station. The CTA said the city had an obligation to notify the agency and follow a formal process before removing a portion of the railroad. According to the Canadian Transportation Act, this means first offering it up for sale and negotiate in good faith with any potential buyers before discontinuing it.

In February of 2018, the CTA ordered the city to make the bridge ready for use in 12 months of receiving notice or discontinue the rail line and bridge. The city then accused the CTA of jurisdictional overreach and prepared to file an appeal. Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson also wrote to Transportation Minister Marc Garneau the following month asking Cabinet to use Section 40 of the Canadian Transportation Act. Mayor Watson said the CTA did not consider the ongoing discussions between Gatineau and Ottawa about using it for transit purposes.

On April 5, 2019 during the same week the city was due to appeal the CTA's decision, the federal cabinet rescinded the CTA decision. This allowed Ottawa to leave the bridge in a state of disrepair without any timelines to discontinue or repair it. This is despite a petition signed by 2000 people accompanying a letter from the Ottawa River Bridge organization on March 19, 2018 asking the federal government to order Ottawa to repair the bridge with clear timelines. The city claims it will use the Prince of Wales Bridge for interprovincial public transit but it has no timeline for the project. Mayor Watson calls it "Phase 3B" of the long-term transit plan, with phase 3A being LRT to the suburb of Kanata.

On May 29, 2019 a study presented by the *Société de transport de l'Outaouais* gave a presentation that questioned the use of the Prince of Wales Bridge as the main link between Gatineau and Ottawa. It brought up the merits of using Portage Bridge as the main transit link and the Prince of Wales Bridge as a secondary link. The City of Ottawa has long considered the Prince of Wales Bridge as a main link. In light of this dissenting opinion there is an even greater need to increase and hasten studies on the Prince of Wales Bridge as a main transit link. Yet the rescinded CTA decision means the City of Ottawa does not have deadlines to adhere to concerning the Prince of Wales Bridge.

The second intervention is as follows:

On March 19, 2019 in the 2019 federal budget, the federal government called for "refreshing existing studies" to create a sixth interprovincial bridge across the Ottawa River. The last time there was a study into a possible sixth bridge, there was vehement opposition. Many residents and the Montfort Hospital were deeply opposed to possible locations, with a key one being across Kettle Island. The study for a bridge crossing Kettle Island began in the early 90s and only ended in 2013, until this new budget brought it up again.

Both Mayor Watson and Gatineau Mayor Maxime Pedneaud-Jobin said they were surprised by this priority. The budget asserted there is a "demonstrated need for an additional National Capital Region crossing"; though Mayor Pedneaud-Jodin disagreed. Instead he said that an LRT system linking the two cities should be the priority, "not starting a process about a future bridge". Similarly, Mayor Watson said "our priority is public transit" and "we can't go and

promote a bridge, which would just be primarily for cars, while we're trying to build a transit link over to Gatineau".

The federal government states in the Budget 2019 that they want to "address the demonstrated need for an additional National Capital Region crossing". Yet opening an investigation into building a sixth bridge is a misalignment with both municipalities' priorities and this option faces intense opposition from locals. The federal government could have helped construct the intercity LRT through the Prince of Wales bridge, thus aligning with both the cities' priorities, the Ministry of Transportation's priority of investing in public transit, and helping the federal government reach its GHG reduction target. Furthermore, building intercity LRT will provide more relief than studying a possible sixth bridge. Instead of doing this however, a month after Budget 2019 was released the federal government intervened and allowed for a slowdown in intercity rail transportation by intervening to rescind the CTA's decision to the City of Ottawa. These contradictory actions inspire questions for the federal government.

Petition Questions

1. To the Minister of Transportation, and the Minister of Environment and Climate Change:

Regarding Budget 2019 and the priority on page 105 to open a study for a sixth bridge crossing the Ottawa River, were environmental assessments done before including it in the budget? If so, please detail the environmental assessment process. Did you consult communities and municipal politicians from both Gatineau and Ottawa in the year leading up to the release of Budget 2019 on this priority? If so which and how many times each community and politician? Did you consult with or take lobby meetings from construction companies on this priority in the year leading up to the release of Budget 2019? If so which and how many times each construction company?

Since the announcement of the Budget 2019 priority to open a study for a sixth bridge crossing the Ottawa River, how many and which communities, municipal politicians, and construction companies have you consulted on this priority?

2. To the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Environment and Climate Change:

What is the estimated range of extra capacity of standard personal vehicles per day the sixth bridge crossing the Ottawa River would be expected to allow? What is the estimated range of standard personal vehicles per day a sixth bridge crossing Ottawa River will service, on an average day? In consultations and discussions with Mayor Watson and city officials about potentially using the Prince of Wale Bridge to in the intercity LRT, how many riders per day did

he estimate the intercity LRT would service and how many cars did they estimate this would take off the road?

Given the number of cars added or taken off with the construction of a sixth bridge crossing the Ottawa River, and alternatively with the construction of the intercity LRT, what is the estimated GHG emissions added or reduced to current Ottawa and Gatineau emissions by each project?

3. To the Minister of Transportation:

What are all figures and estimates regarding the costs incurred by conducting the new study on building a sixth bridge over the Ottawa River, by the building this sixth bridge over the Ottawa River through all possible locations being studies, and by opening the Prince of Wales Bridge constructing LRT with the unused rail line; what are these figures and estimates all broken down by a) the jurisdiction that will shoulder the costs, b) the services, industry, company type, and if possible the specific companies these costs will go to, c) the number of years these costs will be incurred over, broken down by year.

4. To the Minister of Transportation, the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, and the Minister of Environment and Climate Change:

From 2015-2019 inclusively, what were your current total contributions to the LRT system to the cities of Ottawa and Gatineau versus total contributions to bridge and road maintenance and construction within the cities Ottawa and Gatineau? List the grant sources, program, or agency the contributions came out of and break down the contributions by year.

5. To the Minister of Transportation:

Did you consult with the Ottawa River Bridge organization (<https://www.facebook.com/blackbridgeottawa/>) and its members before rescinding the CTA decision to the City of Ottawa? Furthermore, are you aware if the Ottawa River Bridge letter from March 19, 2018 distributed to other ministers?

Did other ministers, their staff, or public servants discuss the option of giving a one-year extension to the City of Ottawa until they return the CTA to with their determination of the intended future use of the Prince of Wales Bridge and, if maintaining the railway line, to require the City present a three-year strategic plan to bring the Prince of Wales Bridge to an operational state within 12 months, as requested in the Ottawa River Bridge letter from March 19, 2018?